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P 041552Z JUN 09
FM USINT HAVANA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4447
INFO RHMFISS/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHMFISS/COGARD INTELCOORDCEN WASHINGTON DC
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RHMFISS/NAVINTELOFC GUANTANAMO BAY CU

C O N F I D E N T I A L HAVANA 000323

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/02/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [CU](#)
SUBJECT: FATHER CONRADO GIVES US THE VIEW FROM SANTIAGO

Classified By: COM Jonathan Farrar for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) COM hosted a lunch for the visiting pastor of the Sta Teresita church in Santiago, Fr, Jose Conrado Rodriguez Alegre on May 21. As he has on previous occasions, Fr. Conrado, as he is known to all, provided insight into a life outside of Havana that still appears to be much harder than that inside the capital city. Fr Conrado described his parishioners as discouraged by the lack of progress in addressing basic needs such as transportation, provision of potable water, and availability of foodstuffs. He said that the security forces are putting much more pressure on the population by enforcing strictly laws that target anyone working outside of the official economy, and suppressing any hint of opposition activity.

¶2. (C) Fr Conrado mentioned that he too was under increased pressure since the publication of an open letter to Raul Castro that he wrote in January. Though the letter simply asks in comparatively respectful terms that President Raul Castro take action to ameliorate the suffering of the Cuban people, especially in rural areas, Fr Conrado said he and his bishop had been visited by state security and warned that his activities were a threat to the status of the church. One official told both Fr Conrado and his bishop that the outspoken priest is the only thing standing in the way of good relations between the GOC and the Catholic Church. Of greater concern to Fr Conrado was the treatment of several university students who appeared in the widely (outside of Cuba that is) viewed blog of Yoanni Sanchez. Sanchez visited Santiago in February and called on Fr Conrado. During her visit he arranged for her to meet with several university students who expressed interest in knowing more about the blogosphere and in discussing the challenges they face living in Cuba. According to Fr. Conrado, since the blog was published (February 4) with a picture of the meeting, state security has visited each of the students whose face appeared and threatened them and their families with severe repercussions (not further described) for having met with Sanchez, whom they described as a tool of the USG.

¶3. (C) Fr Conrado said he is very concerned about the confluence of severe shortages of food, medicine and transport, and the repressive tactics the GOC takes against anyone who complains about the situation. As have other of our contacts, he worried that Cuba was approaching another "special period" and all the suffering that would bring to the Cuban people. He lamented that the GOC had been successful in creating a mindset within Cuban society that causes individuals to believe they can do nothing to improve their life. Therefore, instead of trying to better themselves or band together to help others when times are bad they see only one option: to flee. He added that, ironically, the psychological pressure put on the Cuban people by the GOC does not generate a cowardly response--many will risk everything to take to the sea and escape--but it

does make resistance to authority almost unthinkable.

14. (C) SUMMARY: Fr Conrado has been one of our best sources of information on the state of play in the eastern part of the island for several years. While blessed with a very upbeat personality, he has seldom shared any especially positive experiences. But on this visit he was particularly negative about the situation. His reporting of severe repression of any kind of activity that could be judged to be opposed to the GOC, and the general lack of resources tracks with other information we have gotten from third country diplomats and others who have visited the eastern part of the island recently.

FARRAR